2;Newcomb E-4, 5 (1951-1952) 1956
NM7 Delaware NM7

## A SUMMARY OF DELAWARE CULTURE

105

The means of subsistence of the Delawaran peoples at the opening of the historic period were fairly simple but richly diversified, so that it is difficult to conceive of any of them ever suffering a famine. If the crops of the women failed, they had but to rely more heavily upon the fish and game supplied by the men. There were, moreover, well-developed techniques for preserving and storing agricultural products and wild foods. In short, the techniques of subsistence in this rich habitat provided an abundant supply of foodstuffs for the relatively small population.

Small, semipermanent settlements dotted the coast and river valleys. These virtually autonomous settlements were probably composed of lineages and clans, which possessed fairly definite hunting territories adjacent to their settlements. Even smaller kin units, families, were ordinarily the largest social aggregate in the winter hunting season. The life of an individual centered around his mother's community; his hopes, fears, and aspirations were bound up and identified with this kinship group. The system by which food and goods were produced, distributed, and consumed was also identified with, and was an integral part of, the kinship system. Goods and food were produced by kin groups for their own use. The lineage and clan dealt effectively with most social problems, both economic and governmental, so that above the clan level there were few and but poorly developed institutions. Sachems were only the voice of the kinship units with no special prerogatives and no autocratic power. The clans were probably grouped into three phratries in early historic times, but their function seems to have been wholly ceremonial and not governmental. If a tribe is a grouping of peoples with a single language and dialect, a common culture, and a feeling of unity, then the early historic Delawaran peoples were not even a tribe.

There has been considerable dispute about why the population density for the Eastern Area as a whole was low when the subsistence potential was relatively high. Insofar as there has been an attempt to explain this anomaly, it has generally been in terms of chronic warfare. I have rejected this explanation and suggest that for the Delaware economy to support a larger population would have required male participation in agriculture, stronger governmental mechanisms to control larger cooperative groups of workers, various sorts of specialists, more effective political groupings for offense and defense, and perhaps other alterations in the social system. The small, individually oriented, kin group socioeconomic institutions were sufficient to operate the basically simple technology, but nothing more. There is no doubt that the same techniques of subsistence geared to a different sort of social system could have been more productive. In sum, the nature of the socioeconomic system was such that the productivity of the technological system had reached its peak. Why the population density was relatively

2:Newcomb E-4, 5 (1951-1952) 1956
NM7 Delaware NM7



105 low is no mystery; it would be a mystery instead, if a social structure such as this one could have supported a large population.

As White has suggested, "ideological, or philosophical systems are organizations of beliefs in which human experience finds its interpretation."[1] This was true of early Delaware ideology; most religious and magical rites, for instance, were performed by small groups, often families. The Big House Ceremony may possibly have been a partial exception, but even here I have suggested that the modern ceremony was a late synthesis of early clan, or even family, rites. The individualistic nature of the vision quest and shamanism, to mention two other examples, also reflects the loosely organized, individually oriented nature of Delaware society. Religious and magical rites held to promote gardening were no more stressed, or so it appears, than those dealing with hunting or fishing. It has been seen that gardening was for most Delawares the subsistence activity of greatest importance, but the people themselves, particularly the men, probably did not view it in this light. In general, Delaware supernaturalism was directed at influencing the forces that controlled subsistence activities, health, and welfare. Religious systems deal with uncontrollable and critical spheres of life; this the Delaware religion did, and in a fashion consonant with the life which has been described.

From this reconstruction there comes to view a people who had solved the most pressing problems of life, but not to the extent that they had created a paradise on Earth. Much of a person's life was employed in satisfying basic needs; the hunter's life was arduous, gardening and household duties were onerous, and sudden death was not uncommon. Real knowledge of the world was limited and was blinded to a degree by the common store of misinformation and mythology. In sum, when Europeans saw these people for the first time, they encountered the bearers of a culture well adjusted to a mechanically simple and a socially undifferentiated and individualized way of life, completely unprepared for dealing with the aggressive, technologically complex, well-organized, exploitative culture of Europe.

[1] White, 1949, p. 365.

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# OKLAHOMA DELAWARE CEREMONIES, DANCES AND FEASTS

By Frank G. Speck

## ABSTRACT

Since the appearance of the works of the educated Moravian missionaries, David Zeisberger and John Heckewelder, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the religious systems, philosophies and rituals of the Delaware Nation have been allowed to rest in oblivion by students of native American culture. The backgrounds of colonial history in the east lie deeply imbedded in the cultural problems of the natives. Literary activity of Jesuit author-priests had laid, a century before, an illustrious documentary foundation for American aboriginal and colonial history dealing with the Huron, the Iroquois and the French of Canada and New York, upon which has since been built an extensive series of dignified studies. Availing himself of the opportunities of these early Pennsylvania missionary accounts for an insight into the past, the author has extended his contacts with living native American cultures of Algonkian persuasion to the Delaware Nation now residing in Oklahoma for the purpose of recording and analyzing the indigenous eroyances and rituals still preserved in tradition and in practice. Although separated in space and time by two thousand miles from their homeland in Pennsylvania and New Jersey of two hundred years ago, the research covering some eight years of investigation among the Delawares of Oklahoma and the Delaware-Munsee of Ontario (supported partly by grants from the Faculty Research Fund of the University of Pennsylvania and the Historical Commission of Pennsylvania) has yielded material covering twenty ceremonies and rites which form the contents of this volume. It is a continuation of the field investigated in the author's "A Study of the Delaware Indian Big House Ceremony," Vol. 2, Historical Commission of Pennsylvania, 1931.

The presentation covers Family Feasts, the Bear and the Otter Rites of the Grease Drinking Ceremony, the Mask Dance Rite, the Buffalo Dance Ceremony, Rain Making Ritual, the Spring Prayer and Football Ceremony to Advance Vegetation, the Corn Harvest Ceremony, Rite to Avert Thunder, Mortuary Rites and Procedures, the Ceremonial Training of Men, the Ritualistic Games and Social Dances and an account of the Bone-Burial Ceremony which is attributed in origin to the tribes of the Southeast.

A dominant note is in the family cult rites which have been acquired in Delaware religious history through associations with animals, as related in mythology, which imposed certain ceremonial obligations upon them to avoid infliction of sickness. A tabular arrangement presents the analysis of traits of the ceremonies.

7: Speck E-5 (1928-1932) 1937 NM7 Delaware NM7
Lenape



105 The factual material permits the definition of the ceremonial pattern of the Delawares and an evaluation of the functions of appeal, wrought in humility so unassociated with North American Indian attitudes, to the high god or Creator and the lesser spirit forces, of satisfaction to plant and animal forces, of thanksgiving and subtle magical symbolism. Some of the rites, the addresses and poetically conceived prayers like great music and great poems flow from the heart not from the head, even burning with a fire nearly inspired for their devotion in the manner of religions of the Old World. Many are given in Delaware text recorded phonemically with interlinear and free translations. Notes are inserted where required to explain allusions to Delaware general belief and practice.

Several traditional accounts are included concerning traits (witchcraft and the removal of the flesh from the bones of the deceased before burial) in the now extinct culture of the Nanticoke of the upper Chesapeake Bay area.

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other people. Yet the individual Delaware is not an ordinary American; he is thought of by the public as an Indian, and he thinks of himself as an Indian. One way in which he can express this Indianness and feel that he is a part of a larger group is to be a peyotist. The peyote cult gives him an opportunity to participate in ceremonies with others who occupy a similar position in American life, and it provides him with an opportunity to express his Indian cultural heritage, however slight it may be. In the meeting just described there were Winnebagos, Sioux, and Shawnees, in addition to the Delawares. This is normal for a Delaware peyote meeting; in fact, their meetings always include members of other tribes. They also frequently attend meetings with the Osage, Quapaw, and others. In short, in earlier times the Delaware Big Moon peyote cult was a religious expression of assimilation and an attempt to preserve something from the shattered cultural past. Today it functions more as a religious symbol of the Indian minority and a rallying point for what has been termed a Pan-Indian society (Newcomb, 1955).

## SUMMARY

The arrangement of the tepee and the conduct of Delaware Big Moon peyote meetings has remained essentially constant since 1930. Over this span of time the Big Moon cult has not succeeded in completely replacing the traditional religion, nor has it apparently become any more popular. Probably the greatest changes have occurred in the reasons for the cults' appeal to the Delawares. The modern attractions of the peyote cult are particularly strong in its aspects as an *Indian* ceremony and as a rallying point for Pan-Indianism, rather than in the solace it offers to "a subjugated people."

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